



Saint Louis Audubon Bulletin

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AUDUBON IN ST. LOUIS, 1843

by

John Francis McDermott

Snow was covering the ground when John James Audubon landed at St. Louis at noon on March 28, 1843. Eager to start up the Missouri on his long-planned journey, he was chagrined to find that river solid with ice and to hear that the American Fur Company's steamboat **Omega** would not be leaving for three or four weeks. Is it any wonder that he was always talking about the weather? "Yesterday it poured rain," he wrote home on the 31st, "and last night also until midnight. We had thunder and lightning, the wind turned to the northwest and it is now freezing once more.—When the Spring will come God only knows. Snow again on the morning of April 2, but as all the Swans, Geese, Ducks, Cranes are flying due North we hope for a regular change of weather in a few days. In midafternoon: "a nobler snow storm could not be wished for.—When all this snow and frost will end God only knows." But this was April in St. Louis and by the 17th he could say, "we have had some beautiful warm weather as well as warm rain." Presently, on the day they headed upstream, he acknowledged, "The weather is suffocatingly hot, the thermometer at 75 . . . our coats are off, no waistcoats nor scarcely anything on, and just very warm indeed."

His thoughts and his days were filled with the expedition before him but he did look about him at the town. "The city looks well from the river," he noted on arriving, "but the streets are somewhat narrow and houses rather low (the generality) . . . Many of the steets are not paved, and some are macadamized in the center which renders them muddy or dusty as the weather may be." Rents were high, he found, for good locations. "There is scarcely any business going on at the present time," with the river closed in. Thirty steamers were tied up on the levee bound for all portions of the world, but the river is too low for most of them." The Planter's House he discovered was much larger than the Astor House at home "and the lodgers there pay for *that*," he added significantly.

Marketing, he told his family, "is cheap beyond your guessing. Canvas-back Ducks 12½c each. Wild Geese, 10c. Grouse 5 to

6 cents. Eggs 5 cents a dozen. Flour (the finest in the world!) \$2.12½ barrel retail. Beef 3 cents, the best." Other prices were in line. Veal cost the same as beef, pork was two cents a pound, large, dried venison hams were fifteen cents each, potatoes ten cents a bushel, vegetables could be had practically for the asking. And with all this abundance, he complained, hotel keepers were charging from \$9 to \$12 per week for board.

Audubon and his four companions at first lodged at the Glasgow House, one of the newest hotels, because it was not so expensive as the Planters, but even it was "too good for our purses." Before a week was out Harris, Sprague, Bell, and Squires went to Edwardsville and from there to Bunker Hill, twelve miles north, to hunt birds and live cheaply. Audubon, who had to stay behind to look after preparations, was glad to accept an invitation from his friend Nicholas Berthoud to stay at his house.

The ornithologist had come west well introduced by letters from his friends Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and his son Charles Pierre in New York and he was "wonderfully kindly received" by the Chouteau partners and the family connections in St. Louis. Particularly was he well pleased with Captain Joseph Sire of the **Omega**, "one of the finest specimens of our kind that we have ever seen." But he was impatient to start—all his thoughts were on the business in hand, not social pleasures. "I have had a good many invitations but shun them as much as possible," he wrote home on the 8th. He did dine, however, with one of the local intellectuals, the Reverend William Greenleaf Eliot, minister of the Unitarian Church, and there he met the Episcopalian Bishop Jackson Kemper. On another occasion, at the house of Col. D. D. Mitchell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs West of the Mississippi, he had the pleasure of dining again with his friend Sir William Drummond Stewart, who repeated his invitation to the naturalist to join his party for the Wind River Mountains. Later (April 19th) Mitchell gave Audubon one volume of William Clark's journal for September 13th—December 31st, 1805 (it is now in the William Clark Papers at the Missouri Historical Society). John B. Sarpy of the Fur Company also entertained Audubon with a family dinner at which were present General Charles Gratiot, "old Mr. Chouteau and his son," and Captain Sire. On the 17th the Western Academy of Science made Audubon an honorary member. He was obviously not being neglected.

Audubon found time, too, to stop in the newspaper offices— notices in the press were important to a writer of his kind. The **Daily People's Organ** and the **Missouri Republican** carried stories about his plans and his appearance. "We had the pleasure of his company twice in our sanctum," wrote the editor of the **Old School Democrat** three days after his departure upriver, "and we have never been more gratified or instructed, than by the open, free and enlightened developments of his experiences and well stored mind.—In manners, he is plain, easy, and unaffected, and in conversation, entirely unreserved. He is of low stature and small frame, and very much resembles the very eminent Dr. Physick of Philadelphia. His age, we should think to be, about sixty—but his step is elastic, and he seems to have all the ardor and vigor of youth. His eye is keen and piercing."

The traveler remarked little about birds at this time except to say on April 8 that the "Pewees and Martins have come in

abundance." His concern (since he was now working on the **Quadrupeds**) was with the Red Squirrel (which he sketched here) and with "pouched rats" (gophers). Captain Sire early in April had taken him out to meet eighty-five year old Pierre Chouteau—"so kind and so full of information about the countries of the Indians," a man "still active, with good eyes and a first rate shot." His host, discovering Audubon's interest in gophers, invited him to return. On this second occasion, "having observed several freshly thrown-up mounds in Mr. Chouteau's garden, this excellent gentleman called to some negroes to bring spades and to dig for the animals with the hope that I might procure one alive. All hands went to work with alacrity, in the presence of Dr. Trudeau of St. Louis, my friends the father and son Chouteau and myself." But though the negroes dug across "a large square and two of the walks," they finally had to give up the chase.

All this time Audubon is concerned with his departure. He watched the ice floating in the river, he reported the rising of the water, he kept an eye on the preparations of the **Omega**. He had first seen the boat on April 1, when Captain Sire had taken him aboard the boat then "on the dry dock awaiting for her calking." How long away was April 25th then! "She is a flat-bottomed steamer quite large enough," he reported home, "and we shall have the whole of the ladies cabin allotted for our purpose.—My stateroom is so large that I will keep me a good bedstead and bed.—We will have a large table to draw and write on and we will eat with the Captain." A U. S. Army surgeon was to be one passenger. J. N. Nicollet, Audubon kept hoping would be another. Etienne Provost, an old voyageur who had been twenty-nine years in the employ of the Chouteau firm, a third man of note, would go along to supervise the crowd of **engages** being taken up to the fur posts.

On April 23rd Audubon was happy to announce that "All our provisions are on board." "They had everything agreeable and necessary for our comfort.—Only think that our worthy Captain has some 500 dozens of eggs for the trip upwards! We have 15 dozen Claret, some Brandy and Whiskey." Audubon has laid in some supplies for his own party: blue beads, white beads, vermillion, finger rings, Indian awls, gun worms, combs, butcher knives, gun flints, bar lead, muskrat traps, house rat traps, tobacco, tea, sugar, flour, pilot bread, mess pork, rice, coffee, "bacon hams," olive oil, ginger, epsom salts, gun powder, shot, cornmeal, dressed deerskins, belts and scabbards.

At last, at last—it was half past ten o'clock in the morning of the 25th—the **Omega** headed into "the most remarkable current I ever saw in a river at the rate of three miles per hour." Surrounded by **engages** "somewhat uproarious," firing salutes and hallooing as if mad Indians," Audubon was started on his last great adventure.

Note:—These details of Audubon's visit to St. Louis are principally drawn from his unpublished letters to his family which I am planning to edit for publication. Some information is from **Audubon and his Journals**, edited by Maria R. Audubon and Elliott Coues (2 vol., New York, Scribners, 1897) and from **Up the Missouri with Audubon—The Journal of Edward Harris** which I edited for the University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, 1951).



J. Earl Comfort

On March 17th, Stoner Haven, Lance Jones and Earl Comfort found more than 100 Smith's longspurs at the St. Charles Airport in St. Charles County. After being apparently non-existent in our region it has turned up three years in a row at this field. Many of the birds were in partial breeding plumage. This was the first spring this species showed up in numbers.

There were four Harris Teachers special ornithology class field trips under the direction of Dr. K. C. Sullivan, of the college with Bruce Dowling, August P. Biemann, Earl Hath and Earl Comfort as field leaders. The walks were at the Busch area March 24th, Weber Lake in St. Charles County April 21st; Creve Coeur Lake in St. Louis County, May 5th and Shaw's Garden Arboretum at Gray's Summit, May 19th.

The May 6th annual Spring bird roundup by the combined forces of the St. Louis Audubon and Webster Groves Nature Study Societies resulted in 181 listings. Rarest species were Cape May warbler and clay-colored sparrow.

On May 12th Beulah Bedell led the annual Audubon Society warbler hunt at Creve Coeur Lake where a disappointing number of birds obliged. Apparently they had departed, assisted by favorable winds.

The April 28th Audubon field trip at the Busch Refuge was principally a warbler walk after a hard warm shower, which is usually conducive to good warbler listing.

There were two Audubon sponsored Shaw's Garden Saturday morning walks the last two weeks of April led by the Wamhoff sisters and Lance Jones. Two rare listings, two Swainson's hawks near Swan Lake by Dave and Lance Jones, Jack McDonald, Stoner Haven and Fred Blake on March 25th.

SUET CAKES ... SUNFLOWER SEED ... PEANUT BUTTER BALLS

WILD BIRD SEED MIXTURE ... BIRD HOUSES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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OBSERVATIONS

On June 16th four members of the St. Louis Audubon Society were honored by an invitation to assist Leonard Hall in a bird census of Possum Trot Farm, made famous by Leonard's interesting column regularly in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Dick Grossenheider, Rex Conyers, Earl Hath and Earl Comfort, were in the company of the noted lecturer and conservationist as we sought nesting species while many interesting topics were discussed. After the walk we were treated to a tasty meal prepared by Mrs. Hall (Ginnie). As would be expected, the greater part of the lunch was prepared from home products. A visit with Len and Ginnie is one to be remembered as among the most pleasant. There was a good listing with blue grosbeaks plentiful.

Thanks to the rejuvenated St. Charles County marshes Spring shorebirding was more interesting and more productive than any of the past four spring seasons. Twenty-four species were listed, rarest being black-bellied plover, turnstone, willet, white-rumped, Baird's, red-backed and Western sandpipers, sanderling and Wilson's phalarope. There was an invasion of Wilson's phalaropes in our area, the like of which no birder is able to recall.

FIELD TRIPS

Beginning Sunday, September 9th, monthly Field Trips at the Busch Wild Life Area will be scheduled in conjunction with the Webster Groves Nature Study Society each to be on the Second Sunday of the month. A Field Trip has been scheduled on the third Saturday of each month to begin September 15th. These trips will begin at restaurant at foot of hill at Creve Coeur Lake. All Field Trips will begin promptly at 8:00 a.m.

Dr. Peter Eck, a member of the St. Louis Audubon Society residing at 19 Deer Creek Woods, recently reported a Colony of 35 pair of Black Crowned Night Herons nesting in a woods in the rear of his premises.

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PUBLISHED BY

The St. Louis Audubon Society

Earl H. Hath.....President

James F. Comfort.....Editor

Mrs. J. Marshall Magner.....Executive Secretary

SCREEN TOURS

This year the Audubon Society of St. Louis will again sponsor a series of five SCREEN TOURS. The first will be held Friday, October 12th, when Patricia Bailey Witherspoon, will follow in the footsteps of her illustrious father and present a colored film and commentary on KANGAROO COUNTRY. All programs will be held at the Third Baptist Church, Grand and Washington and will begin at 8:15 p.m. The St. Louis Audubon Society is again this year bringing these programs to St. Louis as a service in the cause of resource use education. All programs are open to the public. It is suggested your calendar be noted with the following schedule:

Fri., Oct. 12—Patricia Bailey Witherspoon—KANGAROO CONTINENT.

Tues., Nov. 27—Allan D. Cruickschank—RIVER OF THE CRYING BIRD.

Thurs., Jan. 31—Bert Harwell—CANADA NORTH.

Fri., Feb. 22—Albert Wool—RANCH AND RANGE.

Fri., April 26—George Regensburg—LITTLE KNOWN NEW JERSEY.

AUDUBON SOCIETY SPEAKERS AT JUBILEE

For five consecutive Saturdays beginning September 1st, members of the Audubon Society will lecture at the Mid-America Jubilee. There will be two sessions each day, one at 2:00 p.m. and one at 7:30 p.m. Watch the daily newspapers for speakers and subject.

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IN GRATITUDE TO THE MEMBERS OF THE AUDUBON SOCIETY

In Gratitude—

By request of Mr. Earl Hath, I was asked to write an article for the journal of the Audubon Society. Giving me the privilege to choose my own topic with no limit as to space. Could anyone, capable or not, ask for more

But first of all, before I lose myself in this literary exploit, may I have the honor to personally thank the liberal members, one and all, for the gracious honor bestowed on me in a banquet presentation on March 19, 1956 of a plaque, "Conservation Citation."

As a nature lover I confess that I lean towards botany. Because it is with us wherever we are, and wherever we go. It is static and can easily be seen and observed. It is voluminous in shapes, colors and species. It is everywhere, on land and in water. Still, as a nature lover I am infatuated with the **all in nature**. From my earliest childhood on I have been an accumulating observer and collector, in all natural sciences, and have gathered for study and ready observance, all and anything that could furnish light and render service and understanding. In my earlier years, before I singled out into botany proper, I hob-nobbed with the all in nature. I maintained a well-stocked aquarium for anything that I found on my outings that existed in water—I also decorated the walls of my den with glass cases of mounted butterflies, beetles and insect-classified and hermetically sealed—; while the wall space was taken up with mounds of botanical specimens. It was a veritable junk-shop. But to me a study, a sort of mental pull to return to, when the day's job was ended—and all this, that my good wife considered junk was not there for the sake of ornamentation, but for study. That finally grew to more than I could care for and became a burden in place of pleasure. To keep up with it, forced me to keep late hours and finally to follow my doctor's advice to—take a long rest and get away from it.

My employer had observed my gradual decline and when I approached him with my doctor's advice volunteered a month's vacation with pay.

I dropped all but botany—and that is a story by itself.

Beginning with my first adventure when I was a peep in the world—it would cover the space, from falling in the sea trying to catch a tiny fish—"an adventure at the age of three," to this year—standing before an audience bewildered with an Audubon "Conservation Citation" in one arm and a highly prized "Macmillan Wild Flower Book" on the other.—for what?

Oscar Petersen

St. Louis Audubon on KETC

The first program will be Tuesday, Oct. 9, at 8.30 P. M. with succeeding programs fortnightly.

Be sure to see them.

SAINT LOUIS AUDUBON SOCIETY Annual Comparative Financial Statement For the Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 1956

	5-1-55 thru 4-30-56
General Fund	
We started the fiscal year on May 1, with bank balance of-----	\$ 735.46
We received additional cash as follows:	
Memberships (Net Retention) -----	1236.17
Loyalty -----	1249.36
Picnics -----	270.00
Service -----	35.99
Total Receipts -----	\$2791.52
Cash available for use -----	\$3526.98
We expended Cash as follows:	
Salary — Executive Secretary -----	\$ 742.25
National Audubon Society (Screen Tours) -----	500.00
Bulletins -----	426.70
Mailing, Postage, Printing and Office Expenses -----	397.77
Auditorium Rent -----	150.00
Awards and Scholarships -----	134.50
Telephone -----	48.78
Radio Program -----	37.50
Dues -----	13.00
Total Expenditures -----	\$2450.50
We ended the fiscal year on April 30, 1956, with bank balance of-----	1076.48
All Funds — Year End	
General Fund (First National Bank in St. Louis) -----	\$1076.48
Life Membership Fund -----	389.74
Nature Conservation Fund -----	248.17
Dividend Earnings (Clayton Federal Savings & Loan Ass'n.) ---	32.42
	670.33
Total All Funds -----	\$1746.81

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